

**Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 15:20-23** <sup>20</sup> But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

**Sermon Theme:** Jesus' Resurrection Assures Us of Our Resurrection unto Life Everlasting.

In the name of our crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ dear fellow redeemed;

On Easter Sunday, Christians have been known to greet one another with the joyful declaration, "He is risen." In response to this, Christians have replied in turn by saying, "He is risen indeed." This jubilant manner of greeting one another points to the glorious message of the day, that of Jesus' resurrection from the dead on that first Easter Sunday morn. As expressed by this responsive greeting there is, to be sure, no question or doubt in our minds that Jesus has indeed risen victorious from the grave. The basis for this confidence rests upon the inspired Word of God which tells of many eyewitnesses seeing the risen Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul testifies in his first letter to the Corinthians that the risen Lord "was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." (I Cor.15:5-8)

The special Easter greeting concerning Jesus' resurrection has been used by Christians not only because our Lord's resurrection is a great and glorious historic fact, but also because of the important meaning it has for all those who die in the Lord. Jesus assured His followers saying, "Because I live, you will live also." (Jn.14:19) Jesus' resurrection from the dead has made it possible for all departed believers to be raised from the grave on the last day to a blessed life of immortality. On account of this glorious truth, not only will you find Christians greeting one another at Easter time by declaring that Jesus has risen, but you may also find Christians comforting and cheering one another at the death of Christian brethren by saying, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord, Jesus lives!"

In today's Scripture text, we find the apostle Paul attesting to this wonderful truth that Jesus' resurrection assures us of a resurrection to life everlasting. As Paul discusses this joyous subject, he brings out the fact that while on the one hand death came into the world by one man, yet on the other hand the resurrection to a blessed life of immortality came by another very special God-Man Jesus Christ.

The scene where the wondrous Easter event took place was a small garden located a short distance from Calvary where Jesus had been crucified. This particular garden, owned by Joseph of Arimathea, was devoted to more than just beautifying the landscape

with greenery and flowers. It was also a place for the burial of the dead. When devoted followers of Christ came to this garden expecting to find the lifeless body of Jesus, the plants were not the only thing found to be alive, for an angel reported to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." (Mk.16:6)

The great comfort and joy to be found in those words, "He is risen," can only be experienced by us, first of all, if we remember what took place in yet another garden at the beginning of time and understand its deadly impact on us and all mankind. This garden, which was known as the Garden of Eden, had been planted by God with everything needed to sustain an immortal life for humans. But, what was intended to be a garden of life turned out to be a garden of death when man ate of the forbidden fruit concerning which God had given the solemn warning, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen.2:17) As Adam and Eve ate of this fruit, they reaped death for themselves - a spiritual death that separates the soul of man from God and a temporal death that separates the soul from the body and an eternal death that separates the body and soul from God forever.

This first offense of man had a far reaching, long lasting affect on the rest of mankind, as Paul reveals, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." (Rom.5:12) With death having been introduced into this world and each succeeding generation of mankind falling prey to it, instead of there being a garden of life on this earth to sustain immortal lives, there are rather countless cemeteries that are adorned by gardens.

Those who have failed to recognize the cause of death and God's remedy for it have vainly attempted to rob death of its hold on them by trying a vast array of means to reestablish an immortal life for humans in this world. They have tried to stop the aging process. They have sought to completely eradicate all the deadly diseases. They have envisioned prolonging the lives of people indefinitely by replacing various organs or members of the body. And they have made plans to establish a world order in which there would be no more wars to take the lives of people. And yet, when everything is said and done, no matter what people try to do in order to restore an immortal life in this world, they are unable to conquer or escape from death.

The answer to mankind's quest for life and immortality is to be found in that garden situated close to Calvary. While this garden pales in comparison to the Garden of Eden as far as its external features are concerned, yet this little garden was truly glorious on that first Easter Sunday morning, because it was there that death was shown to be defeated and a future fate of immortality was made a living reality for us. The paradisiacal life that was once lost at the beginning of time shall again be restored and endure through out all eternity. This came about when Jesus Christ broke the bonds of death by physically rising back to life from the dead.

Even as by one man death entered this world and was spread to all mankind, so also by another very special God-Man came the resurrection of the dead to life

everlasting. The God-Man, Christ Jesus, brought life and immortality to mankind when He was offered up on the cross for our offenses and was raised again for our justification. The grip of sin and eternal death lost its hold on us when Jesus offered up His life on the cross for our sins and suffered the penalty of death in our place. And when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, a powerful statement was being made for all the world to know and believe. It revealed that Jesus conquered sin, the power of the devil, and eternal death, and that God accepted all that Jesus had done for our eternal redemption. On that basis He declared the whole world forgiven of all their sins. Remembering also what Jesus had promised to His followers, we also know and confidently believe that because Jesus rose from the dead, we also shall rise from the dead to life everlasting.

When that first Easter Sunday morning rolled around, there were undoubtedly very few people in Jerusalem who gave much thought to the significance of the cross and the grave of Jesus. Their thoughts were more likely directed toward the barley fields that were ripe unto harvest. It was on this day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that the Jews would gather in the first fruits of the harvest and offer them up in the house of God. And then on the following day they would begin to harvest the remainder of the crop.

What these many Jews were yet unaware of was that on that very Sunday the risen Lord Jesus was God's first fruits, which gave evidence of a bountiful harvest to follow. Jesus was the first to rise from the grave with a glorified body, which would never see death again, even as Paul declares in Romans, "Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him." (Rom.6:9) With Jesus being this kind of first fruits, we have the assurance that because of Him many will be gathered in to God's heavenly eternal kingdom on the last day of this world. Like as with Jesus we will be raised from our graves with glorified, perfected bodies never again to suffer death.

When Paul declared that "in Christ all shall be made alive," he was not teaching universalism, which mistakenly holds that everyone will be raised in heavenly glory on the last day irrespective of their attitude toward Christ. It is true that all will be raised from the graves on the last day. However, while some will be raised to glory, others will be raised to everlasting condemnation. Scripture clearly reveals that only those believe in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus as their Savior will be raised to glory. We hear Jesus declaring concerning this, saying, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (Jn.11:25) And in I Thessalonians Paul also declares, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." (4:14)

Praise God that Jesus rose victorious from the grave on that first Easter Sunday and has become the firstfruits of many who will be raised from the grave in glory. And praise God for the gift of faith that enables us to declare with joy and confidence of heart "He is risen indeed." May Jesus' resurrection be a source of constant joy and hope unto life everlasting. Amen

